THE GENIAL IDIOT — By John Kendrick Bangs — He Discusses Riches

"GEE!" cried the Idiot. "What'll they discuss next? Here's a chap asks 'When is a man rich?' and a leading newspaper gets up a controversy over it. First thing we know they'll be seriously discussing 'What Time Is Twelve O'clock?' or 'Why Is a Carrot?'"

"You talk as if there were no room for controversy on the points mentioned,' 'observed Mr. Brief.

"I wasn't speaking to you," said the Idiot. "If you found an axiom with a seating capacity of ten occupied by thirty-two you'd still find room in it for controversy, and it is right that you should. That's your business. If there wasn't controversy in the world, you'd be twin brother to Mr. James Dumps, riding on the hungry wagon. But the rest of us who are 'not lawyers and who don't take money for demurring at the proposition that two and two are four, we don't see any sense in such useless disputation."

"It is not in my legal capacity," retorted Mr. Brief, "but as a man of sense, that I enter my demurrer against your assumption that there can be no question as to what time is twelve o'clock. I can say that it is always twelve o'clock, never anything else but twelve o'clock, and successfully and conclusively defend my statement against the most insidious arguments of an adversary to the contrary. On the other hand, I can, with equal success, absolutely prove that it is twelve o'clock at thirteen minutes past seven, or at nineteen minutes of four, or at six twenty-three, or at any other old hour it pleases me to select. There's no such thing as time of day, universally speaking. What's one man's midday is another's midnight. When you drink your five o'clock tea here, your antipode—"

"My what?" cried the Idiot.

"Your antipode," said the lawyer.

"I never knew I had one," smiled the Idiot. "I had an Uncle George, but my Aunt Ipode is a new one on me. What sort of an old lady is she?"

"Tutt!" ejaculated Mr. Brief, snapping his fingers contemptuously.

"Is she on my mother's or my father's side?" persisted the Idiot. "You needn't get so impatient when I ask. When somebody tries to shove off a new member of my family on me, particularly a female relative, I've got a right to hear the story of the lady's life. I'm not going to let strange females into my family without knowing who they are and where they come from."

"It is a pleasure, Mr. Idiot, a real pleasure, to tell you something that tends toward educating you," said the lawyer. "I wouldn't like the job of telling you all you don't know—it would be too immense for an ordinary mortal—but now and then to impart a bit of knowledge to you is as pleasing a sensation as giving a crust to a starving beggar. Therefore I gladly explain that an antipode is not necessarily a sister of either of your parents, but is your exact geographical opposite. Those who live on the diametrically opposite sides of the earth so that their feet are toward each other are each other's antipodes. Some jumping kangaroo somewhere in Australia may be said to be your antipode. D'ye see?"

"I think so," said the Idiot. "If there were a bottomless pit somewhere running straight through the exact center of the earth with openings at both ends, and I should fall in at one end, and another fellow should fall into the other and we both kept falling until we finally came to a standstill on each other's feet, the resulting situation might be described as a conjunction of the antipodes."

"That's about it," said Mr. Brief. "Considering how quickly you apprehend a situation, it is surprising to me that you don't know more."

"Well, you see, Mr. Brief, you are older than I am," said the Idiot meekly, "and when you'd helped yourself to all the education you need, there wasn't any left for me. I am deeply grateful for the little crumbs of knowledge you let me gather up from the bread box of your information, but I'm hanged if I understand what my newly-discovered asset, the jumping antipode, has to do with Carrots. He may be a kangaroo, or a howling dervish, or a wild man from Lhassa, but I don't see how you can bring him in to aid you in debating 'Why is a Carrot?'"

"Pah!" breathed Mr. Brief impatiently. "For that foolish question I have no time. It is mere idiocy to ask 'Why is a Carrot,' or 'Which is a Turnip,' or 'When does a Cabbage,' but I was willing to discuss 'What time is twelve o'clock,' since it would be an interesting exercise in dialectics, giving ample opportunity for the display of all the most consummate arts of the controversialist and logician. I see, however, that with such an antagonist as yourself, it would be fruitless. I prefer eating prunes."

"I don't care for prunes or dialectics, myself," said the Idiot. "A little fried hominy is about my size. Can't you give me one, Mr. Brief, on 'When is a Man Rich?'"

"I'm afraid I'd better not," said Mr. Brief recovering his good nature, and smiling across the table at his adversary. "I'm afraid it would be too heavy for your digestion."

"As you please," said the Idiot. "But you do wrong to suspect the stomach of one who in the last twenty minutes has successfully absorbed one dozen of Mrs. Pedagog's very delightful buckwheat dollies. Mary, another plateful of the luscious porosities."

"What do your mean by rich?" asked Mr. Whitechoker. "It seems to me that that is the pith of the question."

"Well, I should say that the term rich is a sort of short-hand expression for living on Easy street," said the Idiot. "When a man is living on Easy street he is rich. The most beautiful location for a happy home, in my judgment, is on the corner of Easy street and Long Green avenue, where you can laze away the livelong day listening to the lawn mower as your hired man pushes it up and down the green sward of your government bonds and clips the coupons off; where the dandelions that peep merrily up out of the sodden earth have heads of eighteen karat gold instead of the ordinary yellow shocks of commerce; where bubbling, sparkling champagne purls up from the well-springs, and fountains shoot forth solid silver spray instead of the somewhat damp mitation that we get elsewhere; where our water pipes give forth hot and cold cash at the mere turning of the spigot, and where every trousers pocket in the community is a magic purse that never holds less than all you need, and four dollars to spare. That is what I call being rich—having four dollars to spare all the time; to have seven is affluence, while ten would smack too much of ostentation. For me four would be enough, with say an extra dollar making an even five during the holiday season."

"It is the view I feared you would take," sighed Mr. Whitechoker. "It is after all, material wealth that most men confound with the idea of riches. When we speak of a millionaire, we are invariably supposed to mean a man who has a million dollars; the man is measured and characterized by the amount of filthy lucre he has in his possession; it is pounds, shillings and pence, not the qualities of his intelligence, his morals, the things of the spirit that give him his rating. Alas, that we are all so sordid!"

"We've got to have some standard, Mr. Whitechoker," said the Idiot. It would give rise to much confusion if you didn't. Take a humorist, for instance, with a million jokes on hand; you might call him a millionaire, I suppose, but any landlord who let his bill run over six months would come out at the little end of the horn, unless he was willing to take jokes instead of greenbacks in payment of his accounts. Same way with poets, inventors, bakers, butchers, tailors—everybody I suppose, in one way or another, is a millionaire in one direction, and a bankrupt in another, but until we are permitted to pay our outstanding accounts with the things we produce, it would be wrong to call a man a millionaire on anything other than a gold basis."

"The Idiot speaks well and truly," said Mr. Brief, "and I am glad to be able to agree with him for once. Take his own case, for example. He probably earns ten dollars a week—"

"Two hundred," interrupted the Idiot.

"What? You get $10,000 a year?" cried the lawyer.

"No, I don't get it—I only get $1,200, but I earn $10,000. For a lawyer, you are very loose in your use of language," said the Idiot.

"Well, he has a salary of a hundred dollars a month," resumed Mr. Brief, "but in Idiocy he is a second Monte Cristo. He has more Idiocy in a minute than Rockefeller has oil in a year. He is the William Waldorf Astor of drivel; the Andrew Carnegie of fatuity; the Charles M. Schwab of ineptitude—in short, the J. P. Morgan of nugacity."

"Jee-rusalem," cried the Idiot enthusiastically. "There's a crowd for you. If a man is judged by the company he keeps, I ought to be able to get my note discounted for ten dollars almost any day."

"Aha!" interposed Mr. Brief. "That's just the point I'm coming to. Undoubtedly a billionaire in idiocy, almost controlling the market in that commodity just as Rockefeller controls the oil of the world, it would, nevertheless, be working an infinite wrong upon the community to pass you off as a multi-millionaire, thus enabling you to hold up every tradesman in the vicinity with nothing but blather back of you. Your individual case proves your point that a definite standard of measurement for men is required if there is to be any confidence."

"Still it is too bad, as Mr. Whitechoker says, that men should be judged by the length of their pockets rather than by the riches of the mind," said the Idiot. "Perhaps the language is at fault. It may be that we need a broader terminology to convey the ideas we wish to express. I, for instance, being as you put it, a J. P. Morgan of nugacity, might be called an Idionaire; Mr. Whitechoker dealing, as he does, with things of the spirit, might be known as a biblionaire; Mr. Pedagog, a millionaire in learning, even if poor of purse, might be dubbed a hand-book-of-factsionaire; while you, Mr. Brief, with your marvelous wealth of resource in argument, could be set down as a whollionaire."

"A what?" cried Mr. Brief. "I don't catch the point."

"A whollionaire," said the Idiot.

"What is the derivation?" frowned the lawyer.

"It is from the adverb wholly, signifying entirely, and the phrase on air or up-in-the-air," explained the Idiot. "For descriptive force, I think it is the best word of the lot. Don't you?"

But the lawyer never responded, or if he did, his response was not intelligible.

"Pah!" he was heard to exclaim as he left the room.

"I have heard the same remark before," the Idiot cried after him. "I have a friend who owns an automobile that is always saying the same thing."

Silence ensued for the moment, when Mr. Whitechoker observed, "After all, Mr. Idiot, haven't you found that rich and poor are merely relative terms?"

"Yes," said the Idiot. "Entirely so. We have either poor relatives or rich relatives, and for my part, I've got more from my poor ones than my rich ones."

"Good!" cried Mr. Whitechoker. "That remark does honor to your heart, anyhow."

"Very much more, indeed," said the Idiot. "In fact, I'm getting requests from my poor relatives all the time, and don't hear from the rich more than twice a year."

"Requests from your rich relatives?" asked the bibliomaniac.

"Yes," said the Idiot, "asking me to let them alone."

STAMPS WHICH BRING HIGH PRICES

(New York Times.)

"If any person will bring me a genuine British Guiana 1-cent stamp of the issue of 1856, I will give him $11,000 for it and no questions asked," said a Broadway dealer in stamps and coins. "The stamp is the rarest in existence, and only one specimen is known. I understand it is in the philatelic collection owned by the Prince of Wales. It will no doubt, therefore, ever remain beyond the reach of all other collectors.

"Another British Guiana rarity is the 2-cent stamp of 1860. There are only ten of them known, and they are the first of Guiana's postal emissions. Thirty years ago they were valued at $100 a copy. Today the market value for a single copy is $2,500.

"Second in rarity to the British Guiana stamp of 1856 are the postoffice Mauritius stamps of 1847. Only 1,000 of them were issued, and but twenty-three are now in existence. Their face value is 2 cents. A single specimen was sold last year to a collector in Berlin for $10,000.

"Stamps on which errors in the printing have been made are eagerly snapped up by collectors, and they bring surprising prices. A three-cornered Cape of Good Hope stamp of the 1861 4-pence issue, for instance, was printed by mistake on a quality of paper intended for another British colony. A pair of the stamps were sold not long ago in London for $2,500. A collector in this city has one of the specimens, and he has repeatedly refused extravagant offers for it. Being the fortunate possessor of a fat bank account, however, money inducements have no temptation for him.

"Another stamp which is very highly prized today through the printer's mistake is the Indian four annas stamp of 1872. It is worth $650. Its high value lies in the fact that the center part of the design, the head of the queen is inverted. It is printed in two colors, red and blue, and that is given as the cause for the mistake in printing one of the portions wrong way up. The market value of the correctly impressed stamp is only $2.

"The 1846 10-cent stamp of Baltimore has brought as high as $4,080. The St. Louis 20-cent stamps, issued in 1845, are more valuable still. The last one to exchange hands brought a little over $5,000. I am on the warpath just now for one of the Baltimore stamps for a customer of mine in Philadelphia, a millionaire railroad man. He is ready to pay a very handsome price to secure one. The stamp itself is a rectangular in shape, exactly one inch long, and exceedingly plain in design. It is of a dark blue color, with a thin black border. Written across its full length is the signature in black ink of James M. Buchanan, and immediately below it, in plain black type, is printed the stamp's denomination, 10 cents.

"Another extreme rarity in stampdom is that of the Sandwich islands—the 2-cent specimen of the first issue of the Hawaiian postoffice. Only a very few are in existence, and a single copy is valued at $3,000. The reason this stamp is so scarce is that only two days after their issue fire broke out in the postoffice and destroyed the entire stock, including the plates and dies. The few that are left of the issue and which are so valuable today are the ones that had been circulated before the fire.

"Of Canadian stamps I should say that the 12d stamp of 1851 is the most valuable. Its present market value is $500."

VERY PATIENT.

This Fellow Had Job Beaten About a Mile.

(Perkin Warbeck in New York Times.)

"He was the patientest feller I ever see," said the man from Job Hill. "Jim Baker didn't have such a thing as anger about him. No matter what happened, Jim was for explaining it, and to him a thing explained was a thing excused.

"I never see no such a feller as Jim was—never. Why, when his wife ran away from him he took it jest as quiet, didn't blame her at all and said no doubt she was acting according to her best lights. If he had 'a' been in her place—that was Jim's way of putting everything—very likely he'd 'aa done the same as she did. A man never judged a woman fair, anyway, Jim said, because a man wasn't a woman and didn't know anything about woman nature.

"I asked Jim if he didn't think his wife might have left some of the furniture and at least a part of the money he had hid in an old trunk instead of gobbling up the whole thing while he was away and leaving him nothing.

"'Well, now, look a here,' was Jim's words; 'you can't blame a woman so much. 'Taint her nature to do things by halves. She either does it or she don't do it. No half way about it. She never things of dividing things, as you might say. I suppose she wanted to take something along, as a sort o' reminder o' the old place, you know, and she jest naturally took the whole business.'

"'Yes, but how about that bow-legged swindler she went off with? You ain't goin' to stand for that, are you?' I asked Jim.

"'Slow, now,' replied Jim. 'Don't go too fast. He may be bow-legged to you and me, but then you and me ain't runnin' away with him. Look at him from her standpoint. To her he no doubt looks straighter'n a arrow and O K in every particular. It's the standpoint that you must look at before you judge folks.'

"Now, that was Jim Baker all over. Why, one time he was going to a barn-raising and a dance, and his wife put his best pants out on the line to give them a airin', intending to brush and press them afterward. But she forgot that part, and when Jim was dressing he called for the pants—all the dress-up pants he had—and there the goat had chewed one leg off and was just beginning on the other one. But Jim Baker didn't go out and kill the goat. He didn't abuse his wife like a hired man. He didn't have a fit or a spasm or anything like that. He said it was the goat's nature. He would have done the same thing if he had been a goat. Anybody would. Then he stayed at home and read the Bible all evening.

"Jim had a cow once, the ornriest, stubbornest, ding-dangdest cow I ever see. I'd have brained that beast inside of a day. But Jim didn't. He petted her. One time he made a nice flower bed, and it was a beauty. Soon as he went away that cow got in the yard and stood right in that flower bed and stamped and switched flies all afternoon. When Jim came home he found her there, but he didn't knock her liver out with a fence rail; he didn't pour kerosene over her and light a match; he didn't tie her on the railroad and let the 'Cannon Ball' strike her. He jest went up to her easy like and led her away, mumbling to himself: 'The fine dirt felt soft to her feet. I'd 'a' done the same if I'd been a cow.'

"I never see Jim Baker show the slightest sign of impatience with any living thing but once," said the man from Job Hill, as he lighted his cigar and began to get his bundles together. "Once I'll admit he was mad—mad for him. Jim had a boil on his neck, one of the carbuncle kind, you know, and it was a whopper. Oh, it was a beaut! I never see no such boil as that was—never. One day Jim was settin' out on the steps with his head in his hands and that boil was pulling on him pretty strong. A big white rooster, with whiskers on his feet, was foolin' around Jim and suddenly his eye lit on that big popping boil. He'd no sooner seen it than he determined to take a try at it, and out went his neck and he picked that boil right in the crater. Jim jumped about sixteen feet into the air, and as he came down he saw that rooster legging it across the yard, and then he knew what had done it. At first I thought Jim was going after the fowl, but he caught himself and went back and sat down.

"The only reason I think Jim was a little flustered that time is because I heard him say: 'I suppose I'd 'a' done the same if I'd 'a' been a rooster.' Then he suddenly flared up and added: 'No, I'll be dummed if I would.' It was the kind o' brisk way he said it that made me think that for once Jim had lost his temper a little mite."